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ABSTRACT

Research has revealed linkages among sex, sex-role self-concept, self-esteem, and attributional style, suggesting that sex-role self-concept may mediate the relationship between biological sex and attributional style. Female undergraduates (N=140) completed several questionnaires, including the Bem Sex Role Inventory to determine sex-role self-concept, the Semmel Attributional Style Scale to measure attributional style, and the Janis-Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale to measure self-esteem. Data analysis indicated that the masculinity component of sex-role self-concept was closely related to a positive attributional style. Femininity, although not strongly related to attributional style, was correlated slightly with stability attributions for negative outcomes. Results did not support previous research findings linking an androgynous self-concept with a positive attributional style. (NRB)

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SEX-ROLE SELF-CONCEPT AND ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE

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Sex-Role Self-Concept and Attributional Style

Bernard E. Whitley, Jr. and Paul D. Sweeney
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Attributional style refers to the tendency of individuals to consistently attribute causality for events which affect them to factors which are either internal or external to themselves and either stable or unstable over time (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Ickes & Layden, 1978; Miller & Norman, 1979). Attributional styles have been associated with a number of psychological and demographic variables. For example, what might be called a "positive" attributional style -- a tendency to attribute positive events to internal and stable causes and negative events to external and unstable causes -- has been found to be correlated with high self-esteem (Ickes & Layden, 1978) and low depression (Seligman, Abramson, Semmel, & von Baeyer, 1979), and has also been found to be more prevelant among men than among women (Ickes & Layden, 1978).

Another variable associated with self-esteem and depression is sex-role self-concept. Sex-role self-concept refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as possessing masaculine and

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feminine personality traits (Bem, 1974). Individuals who perceive themselves as possessing a high degree of both masculine and feminine traits are categorized as androgynous; those high on one dimension and low on the other, as masculine or feminine as appropriate; and those low on both the masculinity and femininity dimensions, as undifferentiated (Bem, 1977; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Several scales have been derived for measuring these self-perceptions (e.g., Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), and these perceptions tend to be highly, though not perfectly, correlated with biological sex. In regard to self-esteem and depression, it has been found that androgynous individuals score higher on self-esteem and lower on depression than do members of the other sex-role groups (e.g., Bem, 1977; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Colten, Note 1).

These linkages among sex, sex-role self-concept, self-esteem, and attributional style suggest the possibility that sex-role self-concept might mediate the relationship between biological sex and attributional style. Such a mediation would entail one of the sex-role orientation's being associated with a tendency to attribute causality for positive events to internal and stable causes and negative events to external and unstable causes.

Haddad, Reis, & Ickes (Note 2) explored the relationship between sex-role self-concept and attributional style by administering the Bem (1974) Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), a commonly-used measure of masculinity and femininity, and the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Ickes & Layden, 1978) to a group of college students. The ASQ asks subjects to ascribe causality for a series of positive and negative events to

varying degrees of the four Weiner et al. (1971) causal categories of ability, luck, effort, and task difficulty. Scores are summed across the appropriate events and causal categories to derive stability and internality scores for positive and negative events. Haddad et al. concluded that the attributional style associated with high self-esteem was also associated with an androgynous sex-role self-concept. The present study is an extension of Haddad et al.'s using a more general measure of attributional style.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 140 female introductory psychology students who particiapated in the study as part of a course requirement.

Instruments and Procedure

Sex-role self-concept was measured using the BSRI (Bem, 1974), a commonly-used measure of masculinity and femininity that has been found to have good reliability and validity (Bem, 1977).

Attributional style was measured using the Semmel et al. (Note 3) Attributional Style Scale (SASS). The SASS presents subjects with six positive and six negative outcome situations to which they freely respond with what they feel would be the major cause of the outcome if they had experienced it. The subjects then rate the cause on locus (internal vs external), stability (stable vs unstable), and other dimensions; specific definitions of these dimensions can be found in Seligman et al. (1979).

The SASS therefore differs in two ways from the ASQ used by Haddad et al. (Note 2). First, subjects respond with their own causes rather

than with those defined by the experimenter. This mode of responding recognizes the fact that people often use many more causal categories than those defined by Weiner et al. (1971); see, for example, Elig and Frieze (1979) and Frieze (1976). The second difference lies in the fact that the subjects rate the locus and stability of the causes themselves, judgments which may also differ from those of the experimenter (cf. Wong & Weiner, in press). Thus, attributional judgments assessed by the SASS conform more to the reality experienced by the subject than do those assessed by the ASQ.

In addition to the measures listed above, subjects in this study also completed the Janis-Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale (JF; Robinson & Shaver, 1973), a measure of self-esteem. Scores on the JF were used to replicate findings on the relationship between attributional style and self-esteem (Haddad et al., Note 2; Ickes & Layden, 1978).

Subjects participated in large groups, completing a number of questionnaires including the three measures described above. The order of the questionnaires was counterbalanced in a latin square design to control for order effects. After completing the questionnaire, subjects were given an explanation of the goals and general purpose of the study.

Results

In order to fully explore the data, both factorial and correlational analyses were performed.

Factorial Analyses

For the factorial analyses, subjects were divided into four groups based on median splits of the BSRI masculinity and femininity scores.

Internality and stability scores for positive and negative outcomes were used as dependent variables in 2 x 2 ANOVAs, with masculinity (high, low) and femininity (high, low) treated as independent variables. This 2 x 2 design permits the assesment of the independent relationships of masculinity and femininity with the dependent variables (cf. Bem, 1977); both masculinity and femininity main effects can be identified, and an interaction in which the high masculinity, high femininity cell is different from the others would indicate an androgyny effect.

The mean internality and stability scores for positive and negative outcomes are shown in Table 1; higher scores indicate more internal and stable attributions. For positive outcomes, masculinity was related to attributions that were more internal, $F(1, 136) = 7.86$, $p = .006$, and more stable, $F(1, 136) = 7.81$, $p = .006$; neither femininity nor the masculinity by femininity interaction were related to internality, Fs (1, 136) = 0.11 and 1.23, respectively, or stability Fs (1, 136) = 0.50 and 0.01, respectively. No significant effects were found for negative outcomes: internality attributions were unrelated to masculinity, $F(1, 136) = 1.60$, ns, femininity, F (1, 136) = 0.29, ns, and their interaction, $F(1, 136) = 0.37$, ns; stability attributions were unrelated to masculinity, $F(1, 136) = 0.72$, ns, and the masculinity by femininity interaction, $F(1, 136) = 0.32$, ns; there was, however, a tendency for high femininity to be related to more stable attributions for negative outcomes, $F(1, 136) = 2.56$, $p = .11$.

Correlational Analyses

Table 2 presents the correlations between masculinity, femininity, and self-esteem and internality and stability attributions for positive

Internality and stability scores for positive and negative outcomes were used as dependent variables in 2 x 2 ANOVAs, with masculinity (high, low) and femininity (high, low) treated as independent variables. This 2 x 2 design permits the assesment of the independent relationships of masculinity and femininity with the dependent variables (cf. Bem, 1977); both masculinity and femininity main effects can be identified, and an interaction in which the high masculinity, high femininity cell is different from the others would indicate an androgyny effect.

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Correlational Analyses

Table 2 presents the correlations between masculinity, femininity, and self-esteem and internality and stability attributions for positive

and negative outcomes. For all variables, higher scores indicate higher levels of the construct.

Sex-role self-concept and attributional style. The results of the correlational analyses parallel those of the factorial analyses. Masculinity was correlated with attributions which were more internal, $r = .13$, $p = .06$, and more stable, $r = .21$, $p = .007$, for positive events. Femininity was correlated with stable attributions for negative events, $r = .14$, $p = .06$.

Self-esteem and attributional style. Self-esteem was included in the present study in an attempt to replicate previous findings that self-esteem is positively correlated with a positive attributional style (Ickes & Layden, 1978; Haddad et al., Note 2). This pattern of correlations was found, although the magnitude of the correlations was lower than in previous studies. The results of the present study thus generally replicate previous research on the relationship between attributional style and self-esteem.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that it is the masculinity component of sex-role self-concept that is more closely related to a positive attributional style. Femininity was not found to be strongly related to attributional style, although there was a low correlation between femininity and stability attributions for negative outcomes. These findings are consistent with previous research which indicates that it is the masculinity component of sex-role self-concept which correlates with self-esteem and related constructs (cf. Whitley, Note 4).

The results of the present study thus also fail to confirm Haddad et al.'s (Note 2) finding that an androgynous self-concept is associated with a positive attributional style. One possible reason for the difference in the results of the two studies lies in the operationalization of attributional style. The ASQ used by Haddad et al. operationalizes attributional style from the point of view of the scientist, with subjects responding in theoretically developed categories; the SASS used in the present study, on the other hand, operationalizes attributional style more in terms of the subjects' own categories (cf. Harris, 1979; Sherif & Sherif, 1967). Since the use of the two methods leads to different research results, the question arises as to which is the more valid measure of attributional style.

This question presents the researcher with a dilemma, since responses based on the subjects' own categories may lead to results which are meaningless in terms of theory, that is, "uncodeable" (e.g., Elig & Frieze, 1979; Frieze, 1976), while theory-based categories may be meaningless to respondants (cf., Harris, 1979; Sherif & Sherif, 1967). One can resolve this dilemma either by fiat, declaring either the theory-based or own-categories measure as being a priori more valid, or one can recognize both methods as being simultaneously valid operationalizations of a construct, tapping different aspects of the construct -- in the present case, causality as perceived by the scientist and the respondant. That these two operationalizations may be simultaneously valid is suggested by the fact that both produce similar patterns of correlations with self-esteem.

Research using multiple operationalizations of constructs can be

conducted by the use of latent variable analysis. In this technique, multiple measures are used to define variables, such as personality constructs, which cannot be directly measured ("latent variables"), and the relationships among the latent variables are subjected to statistical analyses. Latent variable analysis has been found to be a powerful tool in many areas of behavioral research. Bentler (1980) provides a fuller discussion of the technique and its applications.

It must be concluded, therefore, that the question of the relationship between sex-role orientation and attributional style (or, more generally, between any latent variables) can best be studied through latent variable analysis. Since multiple measures of both sex-role orientation and attributional style are currently available, research in this direction can begin immediately.

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Table 1

Means of Dependent Variables

	High Masc-High Fem	High Masc-Low Fem	Low Masc-High Fem	Low Masc-Low Fem
N	39	19	42	40
I +	33.92	32.37	30.62	31.10
I -	26.28	25.16	26.95	26.90
S +	33.00	33.44	31.48	30.92
S -	23.95	23.21	25.05	23.32

Note: Masc = Masculinity; Fem = Femininity; I + = Internality for positive outcomes; I - = Internality for negative outcomes; S + = Stability for positive outcomes; S - = Stability for negative outcomes.

Table 2

Correlations of Masculinity, Femininity, and Self-Esteem with the Four Attributional Dimensions

	I +	I -	S +	S -
Masculinity	.13^{+}	.02	.21**	.05
Femininity	.03	.10	.08	.14*
Self-Esteem	.11^{+}	-.16*	.11^{+}	-.15*

$^{+}p < .10$

$^{*}p < .05$

$^{**}p < .01$